

Message Text

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AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 14702

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT EG
SUBJ: INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS: SETBACK FOR MULTIPARTY
DEMOCRACY

SUMMARY. SADAT'S MUCH VAUNTED TRANSITION TO MULTIPARTY
DEMOCRACY HAS ENDED, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY, ALTHOUGH
EARLIER LIBERALIZATION MEASURES AS YET UNAFFECTED.
PRINCIPAL CAUSE WAS CONCERN OVER INTERNAL SECURITY
WHICH RESULTED FROM OPPOSITION'S EXPLOITATION OF NEW
FREEDOM TO LAUNCH INCREASINGLY SHARP ATTACKS AGAINST
GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE AND ALLEGED CORRUPTION
IN HIGH PLACES, BOTH OF WHICH SADAT INTERPRETED AS
DIRECTED AT HIM AND INCITING THE MASSES. OPPOSITION
ACTIVITIES WERE NOT, IN SADAT'S VIEW, ACTS OF RESPONSIBLE
PARTIES WHICH WANTED TO MAKE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM WORK, BUT
ABUSES OF DEMOCRACY. FACT THAT SADAT CHOSE MILITARY
AUDIENCES TO REVIEW SITUATION HAS CONTRIBUTED TO RUMORS
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THAT OPPOSITION IN MILITARY ALSO A FACTOR. HOWEVER,
UNTIL CASES OF OVERT OPPOSITION WITHIN MILITARY CONFIRMED
WE VIEW CAMPAIGN WITH MILITARY AS PREVENTIVE MEASURE.
SADAT HAS REVEALED HIS EXTREME SENSITIVITY TO CRITICIS.
(HEIGHTENED BY UNIVERSAL ADULATION OF FEW MONTHS AGO)
AND HIS PATERNAL APPROACH THAT GIVES HIM "RIGHT" TO
TAKE BACK WHAT HE GRANTED. TO DATE, NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS

AFFECTED ARE FEW. OPPOSITION'S REACTION AND PROVOCATIONS WILL PROBABLY DETERMINE HOW SEVERELY NEW MEASURES ARE APPLIED. FOR TIME BEING, VICTIM OF CRACKDOWN HAS NOT BEEN LIBERALIZATION AS SUCH, (EGYPTIANS STILL ENJOY MORE PERSONAL FREEDOM THAN NEIGHBORING ARAB STATES), BUT EXPERIMENT TO TRANSFORM EGYPT INTO MULTIPARTY DEMOCRACY. WHETHER REPRESSIVE MEASURES OR GRADUAL RETURN TO DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT WILL FOLLOW PROBABLY DEPENDS ON PROGRESS OF THE ECONOMY AND THE PEACE PROCESS BOTH OF WHICH IN DOUBT. FOREIGN POLICY IMPLICATIONS SUBJECT OF SEPTTEL. END SUMMARY.

1 UNTIL RECENTLY, A HALLMARK OF SADAT'S POLICY HAD BEEN POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION. ITS RAPID PACE HAD BEEN LARGELY DICTATED BY SADAT HIMSELF, OFTEN AGAINST THE ADVICE OF SOME OF HIS PRINCIPAL COUNSELORS WHO ARGUED EGYPTIANS WERE NOT YET READY FOR DEMOCRACY. SIX WEEKS AGO SADAT'S PLAN FOR TRANSFORMING EGYPT FROM A SINGEL TO MILTIPARTY STATE HAD REACHED POINT THAT HAD ORIGINALLY BEEN SET FOR 1981. FORUMS WITHIN ASU WERE ESTABLISHED IN MID 1976 AND PLAN WAS FOR POLITICAL PARTIES TO EXIST IN FIVE YEARS. (POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION PROCESS BEGAN SHORTLY AFTER SADAT TOOK OVER IN 1970 WITH CLOSING OF DETENTION CAMPS, DISMANTLING OF NASSER SECRET POLICE APPARATUS AND ADOPTION OF NEW CONSTITUTION. NONE OF THESE MEASURES HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY EVENTS OF PAST SIX WEEKS.) BY
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APRIL 1978 FOUR POLITICAL PARTIES, AND AT LEAST SEVEN INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES, WERE PREPARING TO CONTEST ALEX-ANDRIA BY-ELECTION, WHICH WAS VIEWED AS FIRST BIG TEST FOR NEW WAFD AGAINST MISR PARTY. ACTIVISTS WERE RE-ENTERING POLITICS, WAFDIST LADIES WENT DOOR-TO-DOOR IN UNPRECEDENTED CANVASS, AND PRESS FREEDOM WAS GAINING HEAD OF STEAM.

2. TODAY, WAFD HAS DISSOLVED ITSELF; LEFT HAS SUSPENDED ACTIVITIES AND MAY TAKE ADDITIONAL STEP OF DISSOLVING ITSELF. LEFTIST WEEKLY AL AHALI, TWICE SEIZED, PUBLISHED ITS LAST EDITION JUNE 7. TWENTY-FOUR LEFTISTS ARE INCARCERATED FOR DISTRIBUTING THEIR PARTY'S MANIFESTO; LEFTIST MP WAS DETAINED FOR 15 DAYS; "SOCIALIST PROSECUTOR" HAS BEGUN INVESTIGATING ACTIVITIES OF FIVE LEADING JOURNALISTS; AND PARLIAMENT HAS PASSED AFTER SEVEN-HOUR DEBATE RIGOROUS (AND, SOME SUGGEST, UNCONSTITUTIONAL) LEGISLATION WHICH COULD BE USED TO DISENFRANCHISE, BAR FROM PUBLIC OFFICE, OR DENY EMPLOYMENT TO WIDE RANGE OF CRITICS. IN SHORT, SADAT'S MUCH VAUNTED TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY IS, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY, IN SHAMBLES.

3. WHAT WENT WRONG? THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT PROCESS
TOOK PLACE TOO FAST AND WITH LITTLE PLANNING. CONTRARY
TO EXPECTATIONS, IT WAS ACCELERATED AFTER THE JANUARY
1977 RIOTS, THE WORST IN 24 YEARS. THE EXPLANATION IS
A COMBINATION OF SADAT'S OWN BELIEF IN A LIBERAL SOCIETY
(SOME OF HIS ADVISORS, INCLUDING PRIMIN SALEM, ARGUED
AGAINST LEGALIZATION OF PARTIES) AND THE UNASSAILABLE
HEIGHTS THAT HIS POPULARITY REACHED FOLLOWING THE
JERUSALEM TRIP. THE WAFD PROFITED BY THE LATTER BY
APPLYING FOR LEGALIZATION IN DECEMBER 1977. IN ATMOSPHERE
OF NEW FREEDOM, TO SADAT'S SURPRISE AND CHAGRIN, HIS
CRITICS BECAME INCREASINGLY OUTSPOKEN. AS THEIR ATTACKS
ON GOE MISMANAGEMENT OF THE ECONOMY AND ALLEGED CORRUP-
TION BECAME SHARPER (AND THE PEACE PROCESS BOGGED DOWN)
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THERE WERE CLEAR SIGNS THAT THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT INTEND
TO REMAIN PASSIVEV E.G. SHEIKH ASHUR'S EXPULSION FROM
PEOPLES ASSEMBLY FOR INSULTING SADAT. LEFT AND WAFD
RESPONDED BY SETPPING UP ATTACKS. PRESIDENT, SALEM AND
OTHERS VIEWED THESE CRITICISMS NOT AS ACTS OF RESPONSIBLE
OPPOSITION, BUT AS INCITEMENT OF MASSES TO EXPRESS THEIR
GRIEVANCES IN VIOLENT WAY.

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4. INTERNAL SECURITY THE KEY. JANUARY 1977 FOOD RIOTS MADE PROFOUND IMPRESSION ON SADAT AND ALL SENIOR EGYPTIAN OFFICIALS, WHO ARE DETERMINED PREVENT REPETITION. IN HIS MAY 28 MEETING WITH ALEXANDRIA FACULTY, SADAT DECLARED "NEVER TELL ME NOT TO BE AFRAID OF THE EVENTS OF 18 AND 19 JANUARY." PRESIDENT BELIEVES, WITH SOME JUSTIFICATION, THAT LEFT EXPLOITED (AT MOSCOW'S BEHEST) SPONTANEOUS JANUARY 1977 DEMONSTRATIONS BY TURNING THEM VIOLENT (AT LEAST MUCH MORE VIOLENT THAT OULD HAVE OTHERWISE BEEN CASE) AND WAS ATTEMPTING TO DO SO AGAIN. PM SALEM AND OTHERS ALMOST CERTAINLY ARGUED THAT IT IMPERATIVE TO MAINTAIN INTERNAL STABILITY SINCE ECONOMIC REFORMS (UNDER IMF ACCORD) ARE GOING TO MEAN FURTHER HARDSHIP FOR POPULACE BEFORE IMPROVEMENT AND PEACE PROCESS IS LIKELY TO REQUIRE MANY MORE MONTHS IF IT SUCCEEDS AT ALL. PUBLICLY SADAT PROFESSES NOT TO HAVE ACTED OUT OF INTERNAL SECURITY CONCERNS, BUT ONLY TO CURB ABUSES OF DEMOCRACY.

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5. CORRUPTION. AL AHALI CONCENTRATED ON ALLEGATIONS OF MALFEASANCE; WAFD PURSUED SAME ISSUE IN PARLIAMENT. OTHER PAPERS WERE FORCED TO INVESTIGATE CHARGES TO MAINAIN CREDIBILITY (E.G. EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF ONE MAJOR PAPER TOLD EMBOFF ONLY PAPER WORTH READING WAS AL AHALI) AND PYRAMIDS PLATEAU PROJECT AND TAX LAW BECAME SYMBOLIC ISSUES. FROM PRESIDENT'S UNPRECEDENTED PUBLIC DEFENSE OF OSMAN AHMED OSMAN IN MAY 14 SPEECH, IT APPARENT CRITICS' ALLEGATIONS OF CORRUPTION HAD TOUCHED SENSITIVE NERVE. OSMAN, AS WELL AS MINCULTURE AL-SAWI ARE RELATED TO SADAT AND SADAT SAID PUBLICLY HE KNEW ATTACKS "DIRECTE AT ME". AL AHALI HINTED, AND POPULAR RUMOR BELIEVES, JIHAN SADAT ALSO INVOLVED IN PERSONAL ENRICHMENT, THOUGH HARD EVIDENCE IS LACKING TO SUPPORT THIS CHARGE.

6. WAFD. WHILE LEFTISTS WERE MAIN TARGET, SADAT CONSISTENTLY OPPOSED REEMERGENCE OF PRE-1952 POLITICIANS AND REPORTS HE RECEIVED (TRUE OF NOT) OF SARAGEDDIN'S DENIGRATION OF 1952 REVOLUTION AS "REVOLUTION OF STREET URCHINS" UNDOUBTEDLY INFLUENCED DECISION. SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS TOO WERE REPORTEDLY CRITICAL OF REEMERGENCE OF WAFD. WE DOUBT, HOWEVER, THAT ACTIVITIES OF WAFD ALONE WOULD HAVE BROUGHT ABOUT CRACKDOWN.

7. ISLAMIC RIGHT. WHILE IKHWAN AND MORE EXTREME ISLAMIC GROUPS ARE NOT TARGETS OF SPECIFIC MEASURES, THEIR ACTIVITIES ARE PART OF CURRENT SCENE AND OF CONCERN TO GOE. PM SALEM HAS ASSURED COPTIC LEADERS THAT "DECISIVE ACTION" WILL BE TAKEN AGAINST EXTREMIST MUSLIMS WHEN "INTERNAL SITUATION IMPROVES" (PARA 3, CAIRO 13106).

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8. ROLE OF THE MILITARY. FACT THAT SADAT CHOSE MILITARY AUDIENCES TO GIVE JUNE 6 AND 7 COMPREHENSIVE REVIEWS OF INTERNAL EVENTS AND PEACE PROCESS, HAS CONTRIBUTED TO RUMORS THAT DISCONTENT WITHIN THE MILITARY MAY ALSO HAVE BEEN IMPORTANT FACTOR. IN OUR VIEW, SENIOR OFFICERS LOOKED ASKANCE AT REEMERGENCE OF WAFD AND HAVE LITTLE OR NO AFFINITY WITH LEFTISTS. WE ASSUME AS WELL THAT DISCONTENT OVER ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IS AS WIDESPREAD WITHIN MILITARY AS CIVILIAN POPULATION AND WAS BEING FANNED BY OPPOSITION ATTACKS. THUS SADAT'S MOVE COULD BE MERELY PREVENTIVE MEASURE. GIVEN ABSENCE OF CONFIRMED REPORTS OF OVERT OPPOSITION WITHIN MILITARY, WE VIEW IT AS SUCH.

9. ROLE OF PRIME MINISTER. MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE PM SALEM BEHIND CRACKDOWN. WE KNOW HE ADVISED AGAINST CREATION OF FORUMS AND POLITICAL PARTIES, HAS LONG BEEN CONCERNED WITH PRESUMED LEFTIST OBJECTIVE OF UNSEATING SADAT, AND HAS RECENTLY CASTIGATED REPORTS OF ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AS LEFTIST EFFORTS DISCREDIT HIM AND HIS GOVERNMENT. INTERNAL SECURITY IS SALEM'S AREA OF EXPERTISE AND PROBABLY MAJOR REASON HE REMAINS PRIME MINISTER. WHILE CRITICS COMPLAIN HIS APPROACH IS SIMPLISTIC AND HEAVY-HANDED, HIS LONG EXPERIENCE MAY HAVE DICTATED THAT THIS WAS NO TIME FOR HESITANCY.

10. OTHER ELEMENTS. SADAT'S FRUSTRATION AND IMPATIENCE WITH PEACE PROCESS (WHICH CAME OUT FORCEFULLY IN JUNE 6 AND 7 SPEECHES) MAY ALSO HAVE FIGURED IN HIS DECISION AS WELL AS VIOLENCE IN IRAN AND COUP IN AFGHANISTAN (WHICH ONE SOURCE CLAIMED SADAT INTERPRETED AS SOVIET SIGNAL TO HIM SINCE THE LAST PRESIDENT DAUD HAD VISITED CAIRO WEEKS BEFORE HIS ASSASSINATION).

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11. SADAT'S STATE OF MIND. FOREIGN JOURNALISTS IN RECENT WEEKS HAVE FOUND PRESIDENT UNUSUALLY IRASCIBLE. INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM ON RESTRICTION OF DEMOCRACY HAS NOT IMPROVED HIS MOOD. AT MAY 30 PRESS CONVERENCE SADAT GAVE IMPRESSION HE WAS BEWILDERED BY SWITCH IN MEDIA REPORTING, PARTICULARLY FROM STATES WHICH HAVE BACKED HIS PEACE EFFORTS. SADAT HAD BEEN BASKING IN GLOW OF WORLD-WIDE ACCLAIM FOR HIS VISIT TO JERUSALEM AND HIS REACTION REVEALS BOTH HIS EXTREME SENSITIVITY TO CIRITICISM AND HIS MISCONCEPTION OF WESTERN DEMOCRACY AND A FREE PRESSM SADAT BELIEVED, PERHAPS NAIVELY, THAT AFTER 25 YEARS OF AUTHORITARIANISM, EGYPTIANS WOULD LOVE HIM FOREVER FOR GRANTING DEMOCRACY. INSTEAD, HE FOUND HIMSELF UNDER ATTACK AND, IN HIS PATERNALISTIC VIEW, EXCERCISED HIS "RIGHT" TO TAKE BACK WHAT HE HAD GRANTED. THAT HE REACTED SO STRONGLY IS NOT UNCHARACTERISTIC, SADAT CAN BE EX-TREMELY TOLOERANTN BUT WHEN HE BELIEVES HE HAS BEEN BETRAYED OR HUMILIATED, THE PENDULUM SWINGS FULL SWEEP.

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12. HOW FAR WILL HE GO? TO DATE, NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS AFFECTED HAVE BEEN FEW. TWENTY-FOUR LEFTISTS WERE ARRESTED FOR DISTRIBUTING PARTY'S MANIFESTO, FIVE EGYPTIAN JOURNALISTS RESIDENT IN EGYPT ARE UNDER INVESTIGATION, BUT NONE HAVE YET BEEN DISCHARGED FROM THEIR PAPERS. FOREIGN JOURNALISTS HAVE NOT BEEN HARASSED. THREE WAFDIST POLITICIANS HAVE BEEN LISTED FOR DISENFRANCHISEMENT BUT THEY ARE STILL ACTIVE--SARAGEDDIN HAS LAUNCHED TWO LIBEL

SUITS AGAINST AKHBAR EDITOR MOUSSA SABRI. EVEN LEFT PARTY STILL FEELS FREE ENOUGH TO HOLD PRESS CONFERENCE. COURT RULED JUNE 7 THAT AL AHALI COULD APPEAR, ALTHOUGH SOME BELIEVE THIS WAS STAGED TO DEMONSTRATE INDEPENDENCE OF JUDICIARY. MODERATION MAY NOT LAST. WE HAVE HEARD REPORTS THAT SOCIALIST PROSECUTOR HAS BEEN INSTRUCTED BUILD "HIGH TREASON" CASE AGAINST HAYKAL. SOME LEFTISTS WILL PROBABLY LOSE THEIR JOBS. DECISIVE FACTOR WILL PROBABLY BE REACTION OF OPPOSITION. IF THEY ARE DETERMINED TO PROVOKE PRESIDENT (AND ARE ABLE TO FIND MEANS OR FORUM TO DO SO), GOE REACTION WILL BE SEVERE. IF OPPOSITION IS QUIESCENT WE EXPECT MOST MEASURES WILL NOT BE APPLIED. CURRENT INDICATIONS ARE THAT WAFD MAY LIE LOW. HOWEVER, LEFTISTS GIVE NO INDICATION THEY PREPARED TO DESIST, ALTHOUGH THEY REPORTEDLY SHAKEN BY SADAT'S JUNE 7 SPEECH SINGLING OUT "VERY FEW" UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS AND THOSE IN CONTACT WITH FOREIGN JOURNALISTS FOR SPECIAL TREATMENT.

13. SHOULD SADAT DECIDE TO USE LEGISLATION SEVERELY IT COULD BACKFIRE. REPRESSION IS PROBABLY ONLY FORCE CAPABLE OF UNITING HIS DISPARATE OPPONENTS. WE ASSUME SADAT RECOGNIZES THIS AND, TOGETHER WITH HIS SENSITIVITY TO EXTERNAL CRITICISM, IT SHOULD LIMIT SEVERITY OF CRACK-
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DOWN. THIS WOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH MILD MANNER IN WHICH "LAW AND ORDER" REFERENDUM OF FEBRUARY 1977 WAS APPLIED. SADAT'S VETO OF TAX BILL AND CANCELLATION OF PYRAMIDS PLATEAU PROJECT (CAIRO 14192) WERE CLEARLY DESIGNED SHORE UP GOVERNMENT CREDIBILITY IN AREAS WHERE IT HAD COME UNDER ATTACK. SALEM'S WELL PUBLICIZED TOUR OF CAIRO SLUMS DURING PAST WEEKEND ALSO APPEARED HAVE SAME PURPOSE. HOPEFULLY, ADDITIONAL SUCH MEASURES WILL BE TAKEN.

14. FOR TIME BEING, VICTIM OF CRACKDOWN HAS NOT BEEN LIBERALIZATION AS SUCH (EGYPTIANS CONTINUE TO ENJOY GREATER PERSONAL FREEDOM THAN ANY NEIGHBORING ARAB STATES), BUT SADAT'S EXPERIMENT TO TRANSFORM EGYPT INTO A MULTIPARTY DEMOCRACY. WHETHER OR NOT REPRESSIVE MEASURES FOLLOW OR A GRADUAL RETURN TO THE DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT WILL ALSO DEPEND IN LARGE MEASURE ON THE PROGRESS OF THE ECONOMY AND THE PEACE PROCESS. BOTH ARE "IFFY" PROPOSITIONS.

15. FOREIGN POLICY IMPLICATIONS WILL BE SUBJECT OF SEPTTEL. EILTS

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